Animism (from Latin anima, "breath, spirit, life") is the religious belief that non-human entities, such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects possess a spiritual essence.

Animism is used in the anthropology of religion as a term for the belief system of some indigenous tribal peoples, especially prior to the development of organized religion.

Although each culture has its own different mythologies and rituals, "animism" is said to describe the most common, foundational thread of indigenous peoples' "spiritual" or "supernatural" perspectives.

The Animistic perspective is so fundamental, mundane, every day, and taken-for-granted that most animistic indigenous people do not even have a word in their languages that corresponds to "animism" (or even "religion"); the term is an anthropological construct.

Largely due to such ethnolinguistic and cultural discrepancies, opinion has differed on whether animism refers to a broad religious belief or to a full-fledged religion in its own right. The currently accepted definition of animism was only developed in the late 19th century by Sir Edward Tylor, who created it as "one of anthropology's earliest concepts, if not the first".

Animism encompasses the beliefs that there is no separation between the spiritual and physical or material world, and that souls or spirits exist, not only in humans, but also in some other animals, plants, rocks, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other entities of the natural environment, including thunder, wind, and shadows. Animism thus rejects Cartesian dualism.
Animism may further attribute souls to abstract concepts such as words, true names, or metaphors in mythology. Some members of the non-tribal world also consider themselves animists.

Animism entails the belief that "all living things have a soul", and thus a central concern of animist thought surrounds how animals can be eaten or otherwise used for humans' subsistence needs.

The actions of non-human animals are viewed as "intentional, planned and purposive", and they are understood to be persons because they are both alive and communicate with others.

In animist world-views, non-human animals are understood to participate in kinship systems and ceremonies with humans, as well as having their own kinship systems and ceremonies.

Harvey cited an example of an animist understanding of animal behavior that occurred at a powwow held by the Conne River Mi'kmaq in 1996; an eagle flew over the proceedings, circling over the central drum group.

The assembled participants called out the word, “kitpu” (meaning eagle), conveying welcome to the bird and expressing pleasure at its beauty, and they later articulated the view that the eagle's actions reflected its approval of the event and the Mi'kmaq's return to traditional spiritual practices.

Some animists also view plant and fungi life as persons and interact with them accordingly.
The most common encounter between humans and these plant and fungi persons is with the former's collection of the latter for food, and for animists this interaction typically has to be carried out respectfully.

Harvey cited the example of Maori communities in New Zealand, who often offer karakia invocations to sweet potatoes as they dig the latter up; while doing so there is an awareness of a kinship relationship between the Maori and the sweet potatoes, with both understood as having arrived in Aotearoa together in the same canoes.

In other instances, animists believe that interaction with plant and fungi persons can result in the communication of things unknown or even otherwise unknowable.

Among some modern Pagans, for instance, relationships are cultivated with specific trees, who are understood to bestow knowledge or physical gifts, such as flowers, sap, or wood that can be used as firewood or to fashion into a wand; in return, these Pagans give offerings to the tree itself, which can come in the form of libations of mead or ale, a drop of blood from a finger, or a strand of wool.

Various animistic cultures also comprehend as stones as persons. Discussing ethnographic work conducted among the Ojibwe, Harvey noted that their society generally conceived of stones as being inanimate, but with two notable exceptions: the stones of the Bell Rocks and those stones which are situated beneath trees struck by lightning, which were understood to have become Thunderous themselves.
The Ojibwe conceived of weather as being capable of having personhood, with storms being conceived of as persons known as 'Thunderous' whose sounds conveyed communications and who engaged in seasonal conflict over the lakes and forests, throwing lightning at lake monsters. Wind, similarly, can be conceived as a person in animistic thought.

The importance of place is also a recurring element of animism, with some places being understood to be persons in their own right.

Animism can also entail relationships being established with non-corporeal spirit entities

May the grace of God be with you always --- Amen.

Pastor Andy Anderson
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